

Nationally Ranked

2013 National Merit Scholars gain recognition for their scores

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This year, BV West has the most National Merit scholars in comparison to the past five years. With eleven commended students and ten semifinalists, the academic Wall of Fame is undergoing alterations to accompany space for all of the new scholars as well as to provide more space in the future.

On Nov. 13, a reception was held for these National Merit scholars to acclaim their academic achievements and hard work. The reception took place in the BV West media center and was attended by the Blue Valley district superintendent and several members of the Kansas Board of Education.

While getting the award seems as simple as taking a test and doing well, the process is actually long and complicated. It begins sophomore year with a practice test to measure which students will achieve on the PSAT their junior year.

“Each year we have quite a few sophomores take the PSAT for practice to see where their score is and from that list,” BV West principal Dr. Lake said. “We look at about 50 kids that we think if they prepare and if they come to our study sessions, that they might have a chance to be recognized in some fashion whether it is commended, semifinalist or finalist. We open that up to any kid.”

Initially, students are recommended for these study sessions based on their sophomore PSAT score, but any student can join the study group. These sessions, hosted by the Gifted Education program, begin in the spring of sophomore year and run until the PSAT test junior year.

“We have a program that we do five sessions in the spring and a practice test in the summer,” Gifted Education teacher Pam Fellingham said. “Then there are five sessions in the fall as well. The fall sessions are based on the data we collect from the testing during the summer. The training in the fall is more academic. We

work with them on areas that they missed in their summer testing.”

Students do not have to be enrolled in the Gifted program to join the sessions, but challenging classes are recommended for PSAT preparation.

“If students have taken more honors and AP classes, it appears that they score better on the PSAT and on the ACT,” Fellingham said.

Unfortunately, there is only one AP class offered between the sophomore PSAT and the junior PSAT, but Fellingham encourages students interested in a high PSAT score to take this class.

“Prior to the time that you take the PSAT in the sophomore year, there is only one Advanced Placement opportunity and that is AP European History,” Fellingham said. “That’s a wonderful class to help prepare kids for the rigors that they will eventually face in college and also for the college entrance exams.”

After the test is taken during junior year, commended students and semifinalists are announced. During the fall of senior year, semifinalists must take the SAT and do well to become a finalist.

“We have ten semifinalists right now,” Lake said. “The majority of the time if they are semi-finalists, they will become finalists as long as they don’t have anything of major blemish on their transcript. Very rarely do we have a kid not go on to be a finalist.”

Being a National Merit finalist can change the price of college and even give students free tuition.

“To be a finalist or semi-finalist it is in the top 1-2%,” Lake said. “It opens a lot of doors for you academically. There are universities out there, that if you are a National Merit finalist you can get free tuition. Some even give you a full ride.”

Being a finalist or a semifinalist helps students find schools that will provide special scholarships. The University of Kansas gives a total of \$40,000 to finalists who select that school as their top choice, Kansas State University gives \$32,000, and

the University of Missouri gives free in-state tuition to finalists. Researching schools that offer special scholarships to finalists helps narrow down the overwhelming amount of schools for them to apply to.

“National Merit didn’t really impact my college experience, since I didn’t end up going to a college that really acknowledges it,” 2012 alumnus Taylor Winkler said. “It did impact my college search experience, since I started looking at colleges that did acknowledge National Merit in financial aid.”

The amount of National Merit scholars may not impact BV West directly, but according to Lake, it can measure the level of preparation for college.

“I don’t know if it impacts the success of [the school] but it shows people what kind of academic rigor we have in our building and how we are preparing our kids to go on to college and to go on and get a career and be successful,” Lake said. “It’s a good barometer for us to measure our kids.”

To display these achievements, the administration is revamping the Academic Wall of Fame. In addition to displaying National Merit scholars, it will hold a plaque for perfect ACT scores, perfect SAT scores, and those who achieved a 32 or higher on the ACT.

“We are going to get a trophy case to display the photos of the current National Merit students more aesthetically,” assistant principal Linda Kapfer said. “I’ve had an art student take a panoramic picture of the front of the building and we want to have that and hang it above the hall of fame. We wanted to add to it a little more and make it more aesthetic.”

Kapfer is heading the project to give a face-lift the Academic Wall of Fame and explains the ongoing goal of recognizing high-achieving students at BV West.

“Hopefully by the end of the year it will be up,” Kapfer said. “We want to add some more recognition.”

How does BV West rank in the district?

School	Amount of Scholars
BV North	31
BV Northwest	27
BV West	21
BV High	20
BV Southwest	2

2013 National Merit Scholars

Semi-Finalists

- Emily Binshtok
- Christopher Birzer
- Kenna Conway
- Patrick Kim
- Charles Lin
- David Mann
- Tyler Morrison
- Jack Owens
- Brandon Smee
- Tiffany Wu

Commended

- Dan Anderson
- Suhaib Bajwa
- William Hershberger
- Spencer Kerfoot
- Stephanie Liang
- Tucker Paine
- Lauren Pino
- Eric Reid
- Kirsti Stahly
- Timmy Tadros
- Cade Vance